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# The DECORATOR and FURNISHER

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## The Decorator and Furnisher

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### CONTENTS OF THIS NUMBER.

PAGE

AMATEUR HOUSE DECORATION—	
A Pern Luncheon. By Hester M. Poole. Linoleum in Decoration, with Design for a Dining-room Screen in Decorated Linoleum. By W. S. Rice. Two Designs for Headings of Chapters—Easy-chair. By C. Westman. Picture Portfolio, for Easel and Chair, and Suggestion for Decorating Bay Window, in Carved Gilt Fretwork. By F. S. Marenzana. Two Designs of Wood Mantels. By J. H. Uttaff. Furniture in the United States Capitol, with Illustrations of Clock in the Capital. By F. B. Brock. Screens for Ladies' Boudoir. By F. O. Whittlesey.	123-124
ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS.....	145-150
ART TRADES SUPPLEMENT.....	151
EDITORIALS.....	152
FURNITURE AND FURNISHINGS—Phases of Furnishing in English, French, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Lines. By R. Davis Benn. At the Waldorf, New York, with Illustrations of Empire Dining Room, Empire Drawing Room, Empire Bedroom, Louis XVI. Bedroom and Pompeian Bed-room. Louis XV. Bedroom Suite. By Geo. W. Smith & Co. Summer Beds and Bedding, with Two Illustrations of Brass Beds. By Hoskins & Sewell. Suggestions for Summer Furnishings. By H. Pringeur. Porcelain, Pottery and Glass—New Designs for China Painting. By Mrs. N. R. Monteith. Violet Design for Plate, Pansy Design for Plate, and Design of Yellow Roses for China Dish. By E. T. Reeves. Decorative TEXTILE FABRICS—Russian Embroideries and Laces, with Six Illustrations. By S. A. Brock Putnam. A French Drapery. By F. Patterson. Decorative Notes.	152-156
MURAL DECORATION—Art and Practice of Stenciling. III., with Illustration of a Modern Interior. By Frederick Parsons. Design of Alternating Panels for a Drawing Room. Stenciling Decoration for a Drawing-room Door. Ceiling Design, executed by Detlef Samman.	141
	142
	143
	144

THE report of the Foreign Committee of the American Furniture Manufacturers' Exposition Association, lately commissioned to investigate the possibilities of American-made furniture in England and Europe, has been submitted to the Association, and contains some very interesting information regarding the policy to be adopted in the manufacture of goods intended for the European market.

**I**N the line of parlor furniture, which is universally known in Europe as drawing-room furniture, the Europeans demand an absolute purity of style, and hence any American manufacturer who in his design is loyal to the source from which his inspiration comes, or, in other words, makes a serious and conscientious effort to reproduce the purity of line of the orthodox styles, will find his patterns accepted, and his success becomes only a question of quality and price.

THE Committee states that thirty per cent of any representative line of American parlor work, in which the purity of style is an element, is marketable in England beyond any question. The inference from such a statement as this, is, that a great deal of furniture is salable in this country in which purity of style is only remotely hinted at. But if the trade demands such productions, the manufacturers cannot be blamed for responding to their market with all the force at their disposal.

**W**HAT is known in America as the ladies' desk, is unknown in England, the ladies' bureau, writing-table and escritoire taking its place. The carved American design with mirror top could not easily be sold in England, but a more modest, more artistic desk, on either the Colonial or French lines, with from one to three drawers below with a plain flat top free from any ornamentation other than a low brass rail, can be produced by our manufacturers at a price satisfactory to the English buyer.

**T**HREE is a wide difference in the make-up of bedroom suites on both sides of the Atlantic. Consequently it would be useless to attempt the introduction of the American chamber suite, as at present designed in the English market. In the American suite, owing perhaps to the migratory character of our people, and the fact that modern houses

possess an abundance of closet room, the wardrobe is conspicuous by its absence. An English suite consists of a wardrobe is conspicuous by its absence. An English suite consists of a wardrobe, a dressing table, a wash-stand, a cabinet, a towel-rack and two chairs. Brass and iron bedsteads are used, but sold separately. In the judgment of the above mentioned Committee, American manufacturers can make the English chamber suite in a manner satisfactory to the British trade at prices that will enable us to establish a splendid trade there. It is noted that the foreign chamber suites are free from the ornamentation so common here, and that this in itself would be a welcome change from the prevailing style. When carving is introduced to any extent, it is confined to a panel, and is elaborately and splendidly done.

**A**LARGE trade is already being done with England in chairs and desks of American make, and the English houses handling this trade enjoy a much greater degree of prosperity than any other line. Many of the dealers find themselves unable to keep pace with their orders, the extent of their business being governed entirely by the amount of stock on hand. This is a very healthy sign, notwithstanding the fact that few of the more attractive patterns of American chairs have been yet imported. The rocking-chair of medium and cheap grade is comparatively unknown in England, but the freedom with which it is taken in high grades of mahogany and marquetry leads the committee to believe that the line of fancy rockers so popular in America at from \$3 to \$12 each, if produced in chaste and correct patterns to suit the English taste, would become immensely popular. The gentlemen engaged in the American chair trade in England have not as yet seen fit to introduce American dining chairs of medium cost, but the buyers who were shown such patterns regarded them as salable, with the possible substitution of leather seats instead of cane, and with but little, if any, changes of pattern in deference to English taste.

**W**HILE the production of art furniture in England has reached as near perfection in lines and period of style as is practical to attain, yet most of the factories in London are comparatively small concerns, where machinery is but little used. In the case of one of the more important factories visited, the only machinery consisted of one rip and one band saw, the balance of the work being executed entirely by hand and by superior workmen. While the finished product was of a very high grade of workmanship, it is in no sense better than can be and is produced by the American manufacturer of the same class, and by American methods of production these goods can be produced at a sufficiently less price to give us an advantage. But it must be distinctly remembered that to obtain this foreign trade it will be necessary to make a line in each instance to conform with English tastes and requirements, and the patterns will, in so many instances, be pure specimens of the known schools of design, so that the greater portion of them will be available for the home trade and be novelties as well. These points represent the situation in general, all else being matters of detail and discussion and determination by the concerns entering the field.

**T**HE event of the year in art circles was the recent exhibition at the American Art Galleries, New York, of Edwin A. Abbey's superb decorations for the Public Library of Boston. They were put in place there under Mr. Abbey's personal supervision.

For a long time Mr. Abbey has been at the head of our illustrators, working always in black and white. No other delineator of Shakespearean scenes and characters, we venture to say, has ever equaled him either in the intelligence and subtlety of his characterization, or in the breadth and completeness of his archaeological knowledge. From being merely a promising boy on *Harper's Weekly*, Mr. Abbey, while still comparatively a young man, has achieved a foremost place in his branch of art and in that place he has remained incomparable.

Now he has surprised and we may say amazed his admirers by an equally distinct success on a scale as far as possible in bigness from that on which he had worked hitherto. From the minutiæ of pen and ink he has in a single bound placed himself in the ranks headed by Puvis de Chavannes, of Paris, as a

decorator on a grand scale. It may be admitted perhaps, that Mr. Abbey is not a colorist in any distinguished sense of the term. It is not in the tone of this monumental work that its chief beauty lies. But greater even than tone is conception, and this series of decorations, having for its subject "The Quest of the Holy Grail," is nobly thought out, skillful and artistic in composition, faultless in drawing and fine in breadth and brilliancy of execution.

The present series, about one-half of what is to constitute the completed scheme, consists of five pane's, two of them designed for long spaces, and the others much smaller. The ancient legend of the Holy Grail is told in these five consecutive tableaux up to a certain point, and will be concluded in five similar paintings. There is a unity in Mr. Abbey's treatment of the theme and a definite pictorial and romantic interest.

**T**HE ideal knight as pictured by Mr. Abbey appears as a young man of light hair and complexion and always in red, excepting in the first scene, a purely decorative scheme, in which he is represented in swaddling clothes held up by a nun before a majestic angel. The background is of a conventionalized pattern in blue and gold, against which are relieved the figures of the angel in a light haze of lilac and the white-robed nun.

In the next scene the young man is preparing for his departure upon his pilgrimage. As he kneels two knights fasten on his spurs, while the nuns in white stand back, each holding a lighted taper. The effect of the candlelight and its reflection upon the intricate chain-mail of the attendant knights is wonderfully painted, not in the least small in treatment, as might appear, but ingenious in the manner in which the effect of great detail is rendered with fine breadth and boldness of brush work.

The third painting is superb in brilliancy and in the masterly manner in which the effect of great numbers of persons is achieved in the famous chamber of the Round Table. Every seat but one is filled, and the throng watches with starting eyes as the blameless knight is led in to take his seat in the vacant place reserved for him who shall be spotless. The place is ablaze with light as a white-robed and hooded old man leads Sir Galahad to his place, and as far as one may see is a glistening canopy of white-winged angels whose golden nimbus form a curving sweep of shining yellow.

**H**AVING fulfilled all the preliminary tests as to his worthiness, the young Sir Galahad attends mass, and kneeling with his companions and followers, the next picture gives us a view of the bestowal of the episcopal benediction upon the searchers for the Holy Grail.

So far as completed, this wonderful series of tableaux takes us but another step. This is to the first failure of the blameless knight. It is a weird scene. In the center of the painting, high up in a royal four-post bedstead, lies the King of the Grail, dead to the world, where for centuries he has been surrounded by the inmates of his castle, all waiting for the hero who is to liberate them from their long trance. Sir Galahad, in a gown of brilliant red, stands near the bier of the living dead man, and surrounded by the sleeping attendants of the old king. Across the castle hall the blameless knight sees the passing procession of the Grail, and he stands perplexed and ponders upon what he must do in this curious emergency. It is only necessary for him to ask what these things denote, but being wise in his own conceit, he seeks to guess the riddle, and thus loses the chance of glory in releasing the old monarch from his enforced sleep of centuries.

And here the story ends for the present, but it may be said that no nobler work of art, on so large a scale, has ever been produced by an American.

Besides this splendid decoration, Mr. Abbey has surprised and delighted his friends, the public, by exhibiting some forty pastels of single figures, nearly all of them of queens or courtiers or actors and actresses of earlier days, and in the quaint costumes in which he delights. Many of these drawings in color, and beautiful color it is, too, we are told, were sold at extraordinary prices on the very first evening of their exhibition, all of which is but added disproof of the truth of the hackneyed proverb about a prophet in his own country.